

ABSTRACT

Objective: Recent studies indicate that aggressive marketing of breast milk substitutes adversely affects mothers' decision-making, leading to a decline in breastfeeding prevalence. This thesis aims to describe and analyze the impact of marketing breast milk substitutes and other factors on the prevalence and duration of breastfeeding in the Czech Republic, particularly in relation to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (the Code). The study focuses on examining the advertising practices of manufacturers, especially in the online environment, and their influence on mothers' decisions regarding breastfeeding and infant feeding methods.

Methodology: A questionnaire was created for the respondents and distributed on Facebook using paid advertising through Meta Business Suite from a profile created specifically for this purpose. The selection of websites, evaluated based on selected parameters according to the Code, was made using the most commonly used search engines in the Czech Republic (Google and Seznam). Additionally, the popularity of these websites among the respondents was considered. The profiles of three breast milk substitute brands that the respondents most frequently used were chosen to evaluate social media accounts. Influencer marketing analysis included influencers ranked among the most influential in the Czech Republic, according to influencer.com, who have young children and publish content targeted at parents. Profiles of influencers with over 30,000 followers who directly collaborated with the profiles of the three breast milk substitute brands most used by the respondents were also included.

Results: In this study, 100% of women (159) planned to breastfeed, yet 6,3% (10) did not breastfeed at all, and 16,4% (26) breastfed for a shorter duration than planned. Insufficient milk supply was the main reason for discontinuation. Most respondents (60,9%) sought breastfeeding information on websites for mothers, Emimino.cz, Modrý Koník.cz, and Maminka.cz were the most visited. All three sites contained misleading advertisements undermining breastfeeding. Inappropriate advertising undermining breastfeeding is common on the social networks of companies operating on the Czech market, and cooperation with influencers is also a common practice in the Czech Republic. Further investigation into the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) revealed that 49,1% of infants were fed alternatives to breast milk during their hospital stay. 58,2% of women saw advertising for breast milk substitutes in hospitals, and 61% encountered it in pediatric offices. 32,7% received free product samples. Advertising's influence on decision-making was acknowledged by 72,4% of women, with 16,4% stating it had a significant impact. Education significantly affected breastfeeding duration, with college-educated mothers breastfeeding longer, although it did not impact exclusive breastfeeding duration. Mothers who used books for information breastfed longer than those relying on social media, though the difference was not statistically significant.

Conclusion: Currently, the Czech Republic does not provide adequate protection for pregnant women, parents, and infants against marketing by breast milk substitute manufacturers. However, the government has approved a comprehensive BFHI strategy promoting a commercial-free healthcare environment. More effective strategies, including education and collaboration with healthcare professionals, are needed to support breastfeeding, particularly in the competitive online environment.

keywords: breastfeeding, The International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes, baby formula, infant feeding, commercial milk formula

